

SAFETY TIPS

It is important to note that sexual assault can only be stopped by the perpetrator. While it is important to do what we can to be safe, please remember that no matter what precautions you may take, you cannot completely protect yourself completely from a sex offender.

DATING SAFETY TIPS

- NEVER be alone with someone ANYWHERE unless you know the person *really* well. This includes being in a vehicle with someone.
- Avoid drinking and drugs. Your judgment can be compromised, and too often perpetrators target victims who may not be in a position to think clearly.
- Set your own sexual limits and communicate those limits to your date. Respect the limits set by your partner. While you cannot read one another's minds, so you must speak, but you need to respect "no".
- Be assertive! Stand up for your rights!
- Trust your instincts! Leave as soon as possible if someone makes you feel uncomfortable. You do not need a reason or excuse to leave anytime and anywhere you are uncomfortable.
- Avoid people who make you feel uncomfortable, even if you don't know why.
- Always have someone to call if you need a ride home.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Signs that you may **not** be safe with someone include:

- Not listening to or respecting you.
- Getting into your personal space to see how you react.
- Refusing requests to stop physical contact.
- Giving intimidating stares.
- Talking about your body or looking at you in a way that is uncomfortable.
- Becoming hostile when you disagree.
- Accepting violence as part of a relationship.
- Believing forced and coerced sexual behaviors are acts of seduction rather than rape.
- Joking or teasing about rape or sexual behavior.
- "Playful" use of force.
- Using manipulation to obtain sexual favors ("if you loved me you would"...", etc.).

To Reduce the Risk of Substance-Related Rape...

- Do not leave beverages unattended.
- Do not take any open beverages, including alcohol, from *anyone*. This includes drinks from punch bowls.
- At a bar or club, accept drinks only from the bartender, waiter or waitress.

Be alert to the behavior of friends. Anyone who seems disproportionately inebriated (drunk or high) in relation to the amount of alcohol they have consumed may be in danger.

Safety Tips for Parents

What to Teach Your Child

Talking with your child about sexual abuse and privacy is just as important as other safety rules you teach your child. Your willingness to discuss sexual abuse with your child shows them that they can also talk to you. Perhaps the most critical child sexual prevention strategy for parents is **good communication**. Talk to your child every day and take time to really listen and observe. Learn as many details as you can about your child's activities and feelings. Encourage him or her to share concerns and problems with you.

Teach your child:

- ⇒ His or her body belongs only to him/her.
- ⇒ It's okay to SAY NO to anyone who might try to touch, hug or kiss them.
- ⇒ No one older or bigger has the right to touch their private parts unless they need help to stay clean or be healthy.
- ⇒ Most people are good, but there are some that may try to hurt children or make them do something that feels confusing or wrong. People you know, trust and maybe even love (grandparent, teacher, etc.) could try to do this. They may call it a special game or secret "just between you and me". It is never ok when this happens and the child should tell.
- ⇒ Any secrets about touching are bad secrets and should NOT be kept. Tell an adult right away if someone tries to make you keep a secret that doesn't feel good or involves someone being hurt or touched when they don't want to be.
- ⇒ Make sure that your child knows that if someone does something uncomfortable or confusing to him/her, like touching or taking a naked picture or giving them gifts, that you want to be told about it.
- ⇒ Be sure that your child knows what other adults they can talk to. Your child should be able to name several trustworthy adults to whom they have easy and frequent access, such as a teacher, a neighbor, a relative, the police, etc.
- ⇒ Someone may even threaten to hurt or kill their parents, pets, etc. if they ever tell about the abuse, but that is a trick abusers use to stop a child from telling.
- ⇒ IT IS *NEVER* THE CHILD'S FAULT if someone tries to hurt or touch them! Reassure the child and explain that he or she will not be blamed for whatever an adult or older person does with the child.
- ⇒ Do not force your child to hug, kiss, or touch when they don't want to (such as "give Auntie a kiss").
- ⇒ It is never too late to tell, even if something happened a long time ago.

Observe Physical and Behavioral Signs

Children who may be too frightened to talk about sexual molestation may exhibit a variety of physical and behavioral signals. Any or several of the following signs may be significant. Please note that these are signs that something is wrong, it could be sexual abuse, or it could be something else.

- Extreme changes in behavior.
- Significant change in appetite.
- Recurrent nightmares or disturbed sleep patterns and fear of the dark.
- Returning to more babyish behavior such as bedwetting, thumb sucking, or excessive crying.
- Torn or stained underclothing.
- Vaginal or rectal bleeding, pain, itching, swollen genitals, and vaginal discharge.
- Genital infections or venereal disease.
- Unusual interest in or knowledge of sexual matters, expressing affection in ways inappropriate for a child of that age.

- Fear of a person or an intense dislike at being left somewhere or with someone.
- Other behavior signals such as aggressive or disruptive behavior, withdrawal, running away, problems in school.

If you are concerned about your child's sexual behavior, Dr. Toni Cavanaugh Johnson provides an excellent booklet on Understanding Children's Normal Sexual Behaviors:

<http://www.tcavjohn.com/orderform.htm>